Newspapers.com by Ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/477394931/

The Conflagration.

St. Marys is again visited by a Large Conflagration.

Judge Alva Higby meets his Death in the Endeavor to Save Property.

Other Casualties Reported Making the Event one long to be Remembered.

Topics and Gossip about the Fire in General, making Interesting Reading.

About 12:40 a. m. on Saturday last, the lurid glare of a conflagration aroused the slumbering city of St. Marys, and proclaimed the fact of the fire fiend once again giving us a visit. In a few minutes the alarm was spread, and it was found that the seat of the flames was located in the building occupied by Mueller & Debacker, grocery, on Bertrand avenue.

Among other people awakened by the cry of fire was the editor of THE EXPRESS, who, on glancing through the window, observed that the affair meant business. He plunged into his clothing, and with all haste made his way down town. At that time the forked tongue of the fire demon was commencing to lap with devouring fury the inside of A. Urbansky's stone building, which adjoins the one in which the fire started. At the same time the element was eating its way westward, and it looked as if the business centre of St. Marys were about to be consumed. Already a number of kind friends were working like heroes in THE EXPRESS office, saving the goods and material from utter destruction and hardly had they their self-appointed labors done ere the fire commenced lapping the sides of the building. Hammer's frame building adjoining on the east was also burnt, but Wirt & Co.'s meat market on the corner of Fifth street and Bertrand avenue was saved, although in a badly damaged condition. On the west side of Mueller & Debacker's store two frame buildings were burnt, owned respectively by Dr. H. C. Linn, and Mrs. L. R. Palmer. Another one-story frame owned by Chas. Dimbler was torn down, thus stopping the flames in that direction.

In almost less time than it takes to tell it, the work of devastation was accomplished.

By two o'clock the fire had so subsided as to allow the passenger train from the east to pass by. From that time until daylight, the crowds slowly dispersed, and the self-appointed policeman as he steadily guarded the rescued goods was the only sound that awakened the echoes.

THE LOSSES AND INSURANCE.

The heaviest loser by the fire was A. Urbansky. He had no insurance of $15,000 on stock and buildings, but his loss must amount to $25,000 or $30,000.

Henry Hammer's building was burned, and his loss amounts to about $600 with no insurance.

Mueller & Debacker had an insurance on their grocery stock of $3,000. In the second story of the same building was the Star printing office. It was a total loss of about $1,400, and no insurance.

The building owned by Dr. H. C. Linn is a loss of $700 or $800, and no insurance. The occupants saved all their goods.

The frame building owned by Mrs. Palmer was worth about the same as the foregoing.

The frame building owned by Chas. Dimbler on the extreme west end was torn down and is about a total loss. It was worth about the same as the others.

Mr. Hackman, we understand, loses about $2,000 on his building.

It will be seen that the total loss amounts to about $40,000, with an insurance of hardly half.

THE CASUALTIES.

When gray daylight came, revealing the curling smoke of the dying embers, and the huge desolateness of the stalwart walls, the people commenced inquiring as to the casualties of the night. It immediately became known that Police Judge Alva Higby was among the missing, and those knowing the daring resoluteness of the man expressed it as their opinion that his body was lying among the ruins, charred beyond recognition. As soon as the ruins became sufficiently cool, a band of workers commenced their operations and thoroughly searched the east side of Urbansky's buildings. Nothing was found, however, and no choice was left but to search the interior of Urbansky's stone store, where it was more than probable the unfortunate man was. Before this could be done, however, the swaying walls were torn down. The search was continued all of Saturday, and on Sunday morning, remains of such a character were discovered as to leave no doubt in the minds of mourning friends and relatives that here Mr. Higby met his premature and sad death.

Mr. Edward Byrne met with a serious accident while in Urbansky's building at about the same time that Alva Higby was killed. There is no doubt but what a quantity of gunpowder stored in Mueller & Debacker's store exploded with the fatal result above described, and also severely burned Mr. Byrne's face and hands in a painful and dangerous manner. He was conveyed to his residence on Mission street and his condition relieved as much as possible. We are informed that he is getting along very nicely and in a comparatively short time will be able to be around again.

Mr. Z. T. Trumbo was so unfortunate during the excitement as to run a large spike through the sole of his boot and sustained a severe injury. He was conveyed to his house, and is getting along in good style.

JUDGE ALVA HIGBY.

In the early part of the conflagration, there was a terrible explosion proceeding from Mueller and Debacker's store, which greatly increased the violence of the flames. It was from this cause, undoubtedly, that Alva Higby met his death. Brave almost to rashness, he had entered the building and received the full effects of the large amount of powder, and his spirit winged its flight from earth.

On Sunday morning last, the searchers in the ruins came across such evidences as to settle beyond doubt the proof of his death. The cuhoom key and knife which Mr. Higby was known to carry were found in the front part of Mueller & Debacker's store, and a few charred bones were also discovered. These latter were examined by competent authorities and pronounced to be from a human body.

On Monday afternoon, about 2 o'clock, interment of the remains was made in the Catholic cemetery with fitting ceremonies. A large number of old acquaintances and relatives accompanied the remains to the last resting place.

In many respects, we find Judge Higby to have been a remarkable man. He went through adversities that would have crushed other men. Although nearly 67 years old, his form was almost as straight and his nerve as black as a man of half his age. He came here in the earliest days of white settlement, and acted in various responsible capacities. At one time he was quite wealthy, being engaged in the mercantile business, but adversities ruined him financially. He was married several times, his first wife dying nearly a score of years ago. He had several children by this marriage who are well known and universally respected.

In addition to all this, Alva Higby was known everywhere as an honest man. This is the testimony of men who have been associated with him in business and is, in fact, the testimony of all who have known him. As we said before, he was a man of dauntless courage, there being many instances recited wherein, in early days of excitement and trouble, he performed deeds of valor and accomplished things at which other men would have hesitated and backed down. He was found on the side of peace and order, and in him St. Marys does, indeed, lose a good and worthy citizen.

THANKS TO OUR FRIENDS.

THE EXPRESS is under many obligations to the friends who so gallantly came to the rescue in our absence. Among them, in the hurry and confusion incidental, we noticed Messrs. E. H. Karney, E. G. Olson, A. W. Chabin of the Star, Wm. Bowers, Steve. A. Sinsus and others. When Mr. Chabin saw that it was useless to attempt saving anything of the Star's effects, with characteristic generosity he pitched in and helped out his opponent. This is one plendid characteristic of St. Marys—when there is danger there is but one common cause.

THE CAUSE OF THE FIRE.

There is no difficulty in telling in what building the fire started, but as to how it started is the question. It would seem by us that on an occasion where so much property is consumed, and there are such disastrous results to life, that the people at large should insist upon knowing something—or at least endeavor to know something—of the manner in which the conflagration started and why it started. This whole affair has been no trifling matter; it resulted in the hurrying of one soul to eternity and the injury, personality, of others. The right at Liberty could very readily resolve itself into a court of inquiry and endeavor to learn where the blame rests.

THE LADIES OF ST. MARYS

deserve the highest praise for the heroic and sensible manner in which they grapple adversities. They carry water, protect goods and even assist in saving them when assistance is needed. Other towns have plenty of women, but it is not often that they come to the front in the manner in which St. Marys women do. And at the same time, they are refined, intelligent, handsome, dress with taste and as a general thing are good housekeepers.

SHALL WE HAVE THAT FRANCHISE.

The events of Saturday morning again cause the above question to be asked. Will it cost more to organize a hook and ladder company and put the hand engine in repair than to have a few more $40,000 fires?

THE SUBJECT OF REBUILDING.

Since the fire the weather has been of such a nature as to prevent many calculations for the future. We have no doubt, however, about the rebuilding of the greater portion of the burnt district. As we understand it, Mr. A. Urbansky intended building in the spring and had made all calculations for the same. The frame buildings that were burnt were mere shells which would have been eventually replaced by more substantial ones, and it is to be hoped that on the advent of good weather excavations will be made and everything pushed ahead for vast improvements.

THE ARTISTIC SIDE.

A conflagration at night is, at the least, an awe-inspiring sight. The flames seem to roll in huge billows upward, casting a yellow reflection upon the opposite hills and, glowing like a mirror in a thousand and one windows. The roar of the flames, the crackling of the burning timbers and the shouts of the swaying, surging multitudes awaken the bravery of manhood, palsies a multitude of passions in the human countenance, and causes men to perform deeds of valor. Selfishness is lost in the grand rush. Personal dislikes are dropped, sympathies are quickened, and each man at the rope pulls elbow for elbow with his neighbor. It is when the flames seem to reach highest and cry out in delight of their insatiate appetites and growl aloud in the fury of a disappointed and balked desire, that men's pulses throb high and quick and even he who sees his property vanishing in this air hardly realizes the misfortune in anything like its full, crushing force. But when the fire dies away, and the curling smoke and the odor of burnt materials cling around the scene, and the men who are left behind gather in a little group around the ruins, conversing in low tones, then the emptiness of worldly possessions glares in upon a man's soul.

***

We can see men standing by the fire when it is nearly burnt away, and from the distance their profiles seem to enlarge and become distended. Now one of them sees something in the fire which attracts his attention and he bends low, with his hand over his eyes, to see what it may be. It requires no stretch of the imagination to make one think of the old doctrine of a burning and seething hereafter—a portion of which has for the once been transplanted to earth, and we wonder how many souls are confined in that one fiery furnace.

Card of Thanks.

The family and friends of the late Alva Higby would express their deep appreciation to the citizens of St. Marys for the sympathy, aid and heroic exertions extended to them within the past few days in one way and another. May adversity meet them with its lightest force is the swish of the bereaved.

Business News.

The light running Rockford Farm Wagon at Anderson & Co's.

Urbansky has a special line of ladies' cloaks. Get his prices.

The Celebrated Kelly Steel Ba can be had only at Anderson & Co.

Hardware—the only complete stock at Anderson & Co's.

Go to Mueller & Debacker's if you want fresh, new groceries.

A nice line of groceries at bottom figures at Anderson & Co's.

If you want a fine ladies' cloak, see Urbansky's line.

Hardware — complete assortment and cheap at Anderson & Co's.

Heaps of Clothing, cheap for cash, at A. B. Pond's.

Pure buckwheat and maple syrup at Mohler's new grocery is very nice.

The happiest man found at last—he bought the light running wagon at Anderson & Co's.

Seager & Helm still sell the old reliable Bain and Harrison wagon—the best in the market.

FOR RENT—A suite of rooms suitable for office and bed room, facing the street. Apply at the Sherman house. 46

Cortland Spring Wagons and Buggies—closing out sale at Anderson & Co's.

Cortland spring wagons at Anderson & Co's.

Rody Gallagle has opened up in Gaslowsky's shoe store, a full line of daily and weekly papers, magazines, and a full line of books and stationery, cigars and tobacco.

St Marys Express Account of Dec 1884 Fire

Clipped By:
debacker_mike
May 24, 2026

Copyright © 2026 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.